

Mayor Mancuso holds lengthy press conference, explains finances, status of other projects

One week after replacing city managing director Pete Judge, Carbondale Mayor Fred Mancuso held a two-hour press conference last Thursday afternoon which amounted to a "state of the city" address.

Mancuso admitted that the city's finances are "not in good shape" and explained several reasons for the large budget deficit. He expressed an interest in working with city council to solve the problem saying, "After this month I want to sit down with council and go over the budget. If they want to lay off the people on the street department, I'll go along with it, but they (council) will have to bear the burden."

The mayor said that he called street department personnel back to work despite additional cost because "we couldn't catch up with the dirty streets, catchbasins, etc."

Mancuso explained that in addition to higher than budgeted expenses for the street department, the police department has accounted for a portion of the city's red ink. He cited the shortage of regular police officers and said that it costs the department extra money to pay "specials" to fill in for several officers who are now on the disabled list.

INFLATION

According to Mancuso, a large part of the city's financial problems is due to inflation. The mayor said that in 1978 Carbondale was fortunate to be selected for three of the six federal highway projects approved for Lackawanna County. Those projects included the reconstruction of Church Street and 42nd Street, and the installation of new traffic lights. The following year Carbondale was selected for three more projects: reconstruction of Fallbrook Street, Gordon Avenue, and Dundaff Street.

Although 75 percent of the projects

costs are paid by the federal government, 25 percent must be paid by the city, and since inflation created a cost overrun of about one percent a month, the city is now faced with much higher bills than it anticipated.

GORDON AVENUE

The mayor said that the Gordon Avenue repaving project is "back on track now." He blamed the delays on PG&W and one city resident who "wanted to do his own engineering work" on the section of road that passed in front of his house. "I hope the people will be patient," Mancuso said. "They're going to have a nice street when we're finished."

VIADUCT DEMOLITION

Unrolling blueprints for the grade-level crossing, Mancuso demonstrated that the state is fully prepared to demolish the Dundaff Street viaduct. He added that the only thing delaying the project is federal funding.

Mancuso took issue with the Carbondale Chamber of Commerce which had blamed the city officials for "ineptness" in handling the viaduct demolition. He pointed out that several years ago the city initiated steps to have the viaduct "rehabilitated." He explained that state money is used to repair bridges and that there are literally thousands of bridges in need of repair throughout the state. The procedures which must be followed to get repairs are complex and time-consuming. A couple of years ago the situation changed completely when the D&H Railroad indicated that it was abandoning a portion of its rail network. The result of the D&H action was that the viaduct could be demolished instead of repaired.

With "demolition" the objective instead of "rehabilitation," federal money was sought and new procedures had to be

followed. According to the mayor, the approval to demolish the viaduct was given in a relatively short time; it is simply the lack of funds which has caused the delay.

In addition to the obvious benefits to the people who must use the viaduct and the property owners in that section of town, the viaduct demolition project will have other benefits. A new drainage system will be installed which should eliminate the street flooding Dundaff Street residents have experienced. Also, the detour route which will run from Scotch Motors on Brooklyn Street past Pizza Crust and along the West Side playground to Hospital Street will entail a \$100,000 paving project. The federal government will pay 100 percent of the costs. The mayor commented that contrary to some report, tractor-trailers will have little trouble negotiating turns at the Hospital Street and Fallbrook Street intersection. "They are making that turn now without any problem," the mayor said.

CITY EMPLOYMENT

The mayor said that for the time being, Joseph Masco will hold the dual position of city finance director and acting managing director. He said that the city will hire two policemen as soon as the City Solicitor issues a legal opinion related to the Civil Service Commission regulations on hiring. The mayor said he expected the hiring to be done within two weeks.

STREET REPAVING

Mancuso said that Park Street, Wayne Street, and Salem Avenue are on the list of streets being considered for repaving under a federal program. He said that he wants the "hump" on Wayne Street leveled out before repaving that street, commenting, "If they pave it first, we'll never get the hump removed."